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ABSTRACT

Invitational education is the process by which people are cordially, creatively, and consistently summoned to realize their potential, emphasizing messages transmitted by people, places, policies, programs, and processes. Based on the democratic ethos, perceptual tradition, and self-concept theory, it offers a perspective for addressing, evaluating, and modifying the total school environment and lets educators assume an invitational stance consisting of five assumptions related to respect, trust, care, optimism, and intentionality. Invitational education must be applied in five areas: people, places, policies, programs, and processes. A four-level classification system describes what occurs in and around schools and provides a starting point for analysis and prescription: intentionally disinviting, unintentionally disinviting, unintentionally inviting, and intentionally inviting. The level of the message depends upon how and why educators do something. Invitational education encourages educators to enrich their lives in four basic dimensions: being personally inviting with oneself and with others and being professionally inviting with oneself and with others. Ten strategies for making invitational education a consistent part of educators' lives include preparing the environment, developing trust, reading situations, and ensuring delivery. Strategies for managing conflict include concern, confer, consult, confront, combat, and conciliate. Strategies for inviting change include the inviting family model and the invitational helix. (Contains 13 references.) (SM)

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Invitational Education

John M. Novak and
William Watson Purkey

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Invitational Education

by
John M. Novak
and
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Table of Contents

Defining Invitational Education 7
- The Democratic Ethos 9
- The Perceptual Tradition 9
- Self-Concept Theory 10

Assuming an Inviting Stance 12
- Respect 12
- Trust 13
- Care 13
- Optimism 14
- Intentionality 15

Five Areas of Application 16
- People 16
- Places 17
- Policies 17
- Programs 18
- Processes 18

Levels of Functioning 20
- Intentionally Disinviting 20
- Unintentionally Disinviting 21
- Unintentionally Inviting 22
- Intentionally Inviting 22
- The Plus Factor 23

Dimensions 25
Being Personally Inviting with Oneself 25
Being Personally Inviting with Others 26
Being Professionally Inviting with Oneself ... 27
Being Professionally Inviting with Others 28

Developing Beyond the Basic Skills of Inviting 30

Managing Conflict 38

Strategies for Inviting Change 44
The Inviting Family Model 44
The Invitational Helix 47
Occasional Interest (Phase I) 48
Systematic Application (Phase II) 49
Pervasive Adoption (Phase III) 50

Conclusion 52

Resources 54

Defining Invitational Education

Communication is necessary for all social relationships. As social institutions, schools are complex message systems. They continually inform people of their worth, ability, and power to direct themselves. In order to participate more responsibly in this communicative process, educators need a perspective that focuses on the power of these messages.

Invitational education is the process by which people are cordially, creatively, and consistently summoned to realize their potential. The focus of invitational education is on the messages transmitted by people, places, policies, programs, and processes.

But the messages we give and receive are never neutral. They can be positive or negative, inviting or disinviting. Inviting messages cordially present something beneficial. They tell people that they matter, have ability, and can participate in meaningful activities. Inviting messages are intended to develop cooperative relationships. Conversely, disinviting messages inform people that they are worthless, incapable of accomplishing much, and unable to participate in anything

that matters. These negating messages are intended to establish control.

The aim of invitational educators is to make the school a more exciting, satisfying, and enriching experience in which people are appreciated and guided in directions that help them grow. Following are a few examples of inviting practices from award-winning institutions:

- Southern Elementary School in Lexington hosts a Principal's Breakfast for students selected by their teachers for recognition.
- Arrowhead Elementary School in Virginia Beach created its own school wave for students and staff to use when greeting each other.
- Hillsborough Elementary in New Brunswick announces student and staff birthdays.
- Calcium Primary School in upstate New York bused its teachers, support staff, and volunteers 1,600 miles over a weekend to receive a special award.
- Midland School in Rye, New York, prominently displays a suggestion box for anyone to use.
- Newman Elementary School in Billings, Montana, provides a "Family Center," a comfortable location for parents to network and check out educational games.
- Byrd Junior High School in Fayetteville, North Carolina, removed a chain-link fence to allow students to feel less restricted within the school grounds.
- Westover High School in Fayetteville, North Carolina, formed a partnership with Grand Island High School in Nebraska and shared teacher visitations.

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- Dauphin Regional Comprehensive Secondary School in Manitoba placed positive signs throughout the school to help solve the litter problem.

These practices are just the tip of the iceberg. What they have in common is a commitment to a theory of communicative practice.

Invitational education is based on three related ideas: the democratic ethos, the perceptual tradition, and self-concept theory.

The Democratic Ethos

Democracy is based on the conviction that all people matter and that they can meaningfully participate in self-rule. Invitational education reflects this democratic ethos by emphasizing deliberative dialogue and mutual respect as people work together to construct the character, practices, and institutions that promote a fulfilling, shared life.

Implied in this approach to democracy is the belief that those who are affected by decisions should have a say in those decisions. Moreover, it also is implied that people can become more intelligent and more thoughtful by doing so. Viewed this way, democracy is an educative approach to constructing a meaningful shared life. The job of invitational educators is to summon all involved to develop the perceptions and habits necessary for sustaining such a way of life.

The Perceptual Tradition

The perceptual tradition stresses that events always are seen through the individual and cultural filters people

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use. Thus an important aspect of the inviting approach is to understand and validate the meaningfulness of people's perceptions and to work with these perceptions to construct shared purposes.

From the perceptual point of view, there is no such thing as illogical behavior. Every person is doing what makes the most sense to him or her at that moment. Learning to "read behavior backwards," to see the meaningfulness in a person's actions from that person's point of view, is a vital skill for those who practice invitational education. This skill is sharpened by attending to self-concept theory.

Self-Concept Theory

Self-concept is the picture people construct of who they are and how they fit in the world. It includes the system of beliefs that an individual holds about his or her personal existence. This system of personal beliefs is maintained, protected, and enhanced by the way events are interpreted and by the choices the individual makes. It also is manifested in an individual's ongoing internal dialogue. This ongoing dialogue, this "whispering self," can be monitored and directed in positive ways.

A basic assumption of invitational education is that there is only one kind of human motivation. This motivation is an internal and continuous incentive that every person has at all times, in all places, during all activities. People may not do what we would like them to do, but that is not the same as being unmotivated. If they were unmotivated, they could not do anything.

There is a tremendous advantage to assuming that motivation is a force that comes from within each person. Rather than spending huge amounts of energy trying to motivate people, those who apply invitational education cordially summon people to see themselves as capable of overcoming obstacles and accomplishing positive goals.

12

Assuming an Inviting Stance

Invitational education offers a perspective for addressing, evaluating, and modifying the total school environment. This perspective allows the educator to assume an "inviting stance," which is a focused framework for sustained action. This stance consists of five assumptions, which take the form of propositions reflecting respect, trust, care, optimism, and intentionality.

Respect

People are valuable, able, and responsible and should be treated accordingly

A democratic society emphasizes the inherent worth of all people, believes in their self-directing power, and stresses the importance of personal and social accountability. Invitational schools do the same. They share responsibility based on mutual respect and expect positive outcomes. This respect is the essence of a cooperative relationship, a relationship that recognizes each person's ability to accept, reject, negotiate, or hold in abeyance the messages sent to them.

In tennis, a player does not jump over the net and hit the ball on his or her opponent's side. Tennis players respect the net. In invitational education, allowing people their personal space to make decisions is called, "respecting the net." It is manifested in everything the school does and every way it does it.

Trust

Education is a cooperative, collaborative activity.

Invitational education is built on the fundamental interdependence of human beings. People are viewed as parts of an ecosystem whose lives are affected by the quantity and quality of messages sent and received.

To develop and sustain a cooperative stance requires the time and effort to establish trustworthy patterns of interaction. Trustworthy patterns of interaction depend on people who demonstrate the following qualities: *reliability* (consistency, dependability, and predictability), *genuineness* (authenticity and congruence), *truthfulness* (honesty, correctness of opinion, and validity of assertion), *intent* (good character, ethical stance, and integrity), and *competence* (intelligent behavior, expertness, and knowledge) (Arceneaux 1994). Trust is established and maintained through these interlocking human qualities, and each reflects invitational education in action.

Care

The process is the product in the making.

Means and ends are integrally linked. To attempt to arrive at inviting ends through disinviting means is to

disregard the fact that how we go about doing something affects what we end up with. Means and ends may be able to be separated on paper, but not in behavior. For example, a high jumper does not go over the bar on the last step, but on the momentum of all the steps leading to the jump. To ignore the approach to the bar (the process) and care only about getting over it (the product) would be careless planning.

In invitational education, *care* is the ongoing desire to link significant personal means with worthwhile societal ends. This acknowledges the personal need for joy and fulfillment in the process of producing something of value. Careful planning and being oriented to positive possibilities help bring this about.

Optimism

People possess untapped potential in all areas of human endeavor.

Invitational educators are committed to the continuous appreciation and growth of all involved in the educative process. They believe that people have only just begun to use their many social, intellectual, emotional, and physical potentials. New and unimagined ways of developing interests and abilities are possible.

This emphasis on human potential is not a naive belief that good things will occur automatically, but a realistic assessment that better things are more likely to occur when self-defeating scripts are held to a minimum. In invitational education, this optimism applies to all realms of possibility, especially in difficult and challenging situations.

Intentionality

Human potential can be realized best by places, policies, processes, and programs specifically designed to invite development and by people who are personally and professionally inviting with themselves and others.

Invitational educators work to sustain learning environments characterized by purpose and direction. They recognize that educators are never neutral and that everything and everybody in and around schools add to or subtract from the educative process.

Assuming an inviting stance provides educators with a shared orientation from which to function. This enables all involved in schools to have a common framework for creating and maintaining a dependably inviting environment. This stance is made evident in the areas, levels, dimensions, skills, and strategies that have been developed in invitational education.

Five Areas of Application

Invitational education still is an evolving practice. As it is refined, new insights are developed and new strategies are suggested. However, there are five areas in which invitational education must be applied. By focusing on the "Five P's"—people, places, policies, programs, and processes—educators can apply steady and persistent pressure to overcome the biggest challenges.

People

Invitational education begins and ends with people. Every person in the school, from teachers and administrators to custodians and volunteers, is an emissary of the school. It is people who create and maintain positive patterns of interpersonal behavior.

These positive interactions must be based on a sense of collegiality. Contrived congeniality, fake enthusiasm, and false smiles are not what is needed. Rather, educators must view other persons in the school as competent and responsive members of a professional learning community. Inviting educators see others as able to accomplish important things.

Places

The landscape and upkeep of the school can announce that people care and are on top of any situation, or they can proclaim that nobody cares and no one feels responsible. Places are powerful, and they can influence the performance and satisfaction of all who inhabit the school.

In most schools, places also are the easiest factors to change. They offer opportunities for immediate improvement. For example, many schools have a sign at the main entrance that says, "Visitors must report to the office." That rather stern message can be changed to "For the safety of our students and for us to better serve you, please report to the office." The sign also might include directions for finding the office. Such a sign lets people know that this is a caring and cared for environment.

Policies

Policies include official mission statements and the directives, codes, and rules, written and unwritten, used to regulate the schools. A school system's policies can have a strong influence on the attitudes of those involved in the school.

When policies are perceived as fair, inclusive, democratic, and respectful, they will have a positive effect on people's attitudes. Policies that seem distant, vague, exclusive, or contradictory send the message that the institution is in disarray.

It is especially important that inviting policies be developed regarding attendance, grading, discipline,

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and promotion. For example, a child who has difficulty following rules should not be suspended but should be referred to the school counselor. An undisciplined child is an uneducated child. Thus zero-tolerance policies can be mindless and spineless because they take away the good judgment of educators.

Programs

Programs can be formal or informal, curricular or extracurricular. It is important for educators to ensure that all the school's programs work for the benefit of everyone and that they encourage active engagement with significant content. This means that programs that appear to be elitist, sexist, ethnocentric, discriminatory, or lacking in intellectual integrity need to be changed or eliminated.

Programs that reflect invitational education are inclusive. They encourage students to see themselves as lifelong learners capable of understanding matters of importance. The use of small-group programs can be especially helpful to enable students to extend their interests and work with others.

Processes

The final P, processes, addresses the feel and flavor of the other four factors and orchestrates them in a democratic manner. Invitational education is a democratic process in which those who are affected by a decision have a say in its formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

For example, creating a comprehensive family involvement program, developing a school wave, or adding programs for academic and social recognition have to be approached in a shared, cooperative manner. Shared ownership is based on the idea that "We are all in this together." Inviting processes are demonstrated through networking and collaborative interactions encouraged in the school.

Levels of Functioning

There are many ways to categorize messages. They can be positive or negative. They can be sent on purpose, or they may be sent unintentionally. They can invite people to meet their potential, or they can be used to hinder someone.

What follows is a four-level classification system for describing what takes place in and around schools. Obviously, human behavior can be much more complex than this. But these four levels provide a starting point for analysis and prescription.

Every person and every school occasionally sends messages at each level. However, it is the typical level of functioning that indicates the person's and the school's atmosphere. In addition, the level of a message does not depend merely on what educators do, but on how and why they do something. It requires persistence, resourcefulness, and integrity to reach the highest level, the top of the top level. We call that highest level the "Plus Factor."

Intentionally Disinviting

This lowest level of functioning describes behaviors, policies, programs, places, and processes that are meant

to take the heart out of a person. These messages are meant to demean, diminish, or devalue the human spirit. People who operate at this level often use their position of trust to bully others by informing them that they are incapable, worthless, and irresponsible.

This level of behavior can be seen in educators who are willfully racist, sexist, homophobic, or elitist. It can be seen in policies that deliberately discriminate, programs that are purposefully demeaning, or places that are left dark and dingy.

Invitational educators must not tolerate such behavior. It is our job to oppose and to work to change such behavior whenever it occurs.

Sometimes, when an educator is angry, tired, or frustrated, he or she may respond in an intentionally disinviting way. It is important not to justify such behavior, though we should seek to understand it. Understanding provides ways to prevent it in the future. Justifying intentionally disinviting behavior sets the stage for it to occur again and again.

Unintentionally Disinviting

Intentionally disinviting behaviors are rare compared with those that are unintentionally disinviting. The latter are performed by educators who mean no harm but are clueless about the injury they are causing through their insensitivity, abruptness, or lack of forethought.

Educators functioning at this level are not reflecting on what they are doing. Their classrooms often are characterized by boredom, busywork, and lack of orchestra-

tion. Much of the work students are doing may be seen as irrelevant or incomprehensible.

Schools that operate at this level are likely to have high dropout and absentee rates for both students and teachers. Morale is low in such schools. Reform strategies are unimaginative or out of touch with the realities the students face.

Unintentionally Inviting

Unintentionally inviting educators are often gregarious and good-natured individuals who are just doing what comes naturally. However, their approach lacks thoughtful commitment. They lack intentionality. They can be likable, entertaining, and enthusiastic while things are working, but they run into difficulty when the "magic" isn't there. When things do not work well, these educators can become frustrated and regress to lower levels of functioning.

The problem with this level is that these educators are unable to tap into a larger explanatory scheme to understand behavior and thus are blown off course easily. They may blame the victim, rather than probe for a deeper understanding of the interactions that surround them. Eventually they can find themselves growing out of touch with their students and reminiscing about the "good old days." When that occurs, they will grow cynical and begin to show more enthusiasm for their eventual retirement than for the task at hand.

Intentionally Inviting

Educators who are intentionally inviting demonstrate integrity in their actions, in the policies and programs

they establish, and in the places and processes they create and maintain. These educators are able to examine and modify their practices and to grow continuously. This deep commitment to caring and democratic purposes is not easy to attain and sustain. It involves a persistence of purpose, an imaginative resourcefulness in finding the positive tipping points in organizations (Gladwell 2000), and a courage not to give in to the cynics.

At the intentionally inviting level, educators choose caring and democratic purposes to focus their educational endeavors. They are able to remind themselves of what is truly important in education: an appreciation of people and their development. Those who practice invitational education not only strive to be intentionally inviting, they also continue to grow and develop.

The Plus Factor

When an inviting perspective has become internalized, it has a chance to become "invisible." An inviting perspective becomes "invisible" because it becomes a way of being in the world, a way of addressing and extending human concerns. It also uncovers new possibilities and creates deeper connections with self, others, and the world. In invitational education, this is called the "plus factor."

Invitational education is based on the idea that everybody and everything adds to, or subtracts from, the educative process. Ideally the people, places, policies, programs, and processes should be so intentionally

inviting as to create a world in which each person is artfully summoned to develop intellectually, socially, physically, and emotionally. Pursuing this ideal is not easy, and sustaining it at the plus-factor level is even more difficult.

Dimensions

Invitational education is not a quick-fix. It takes time, effort, ingenuity, and continual learning. Neither is it intended to be a fad, a blip on the education radar screen. Rather, it seeks to be a contributing part of a larger movement that recognizes that people matter and have untapped potential that can be called forth and enriched.

The goal of invitational education is to encourage educators to enrich their lives in four basic dimensions: 1) being personally inviting with oneself, 2) being personally inviting with others, 3) being professionally inviting with oneself, and 4) being professionally inviting with others. Like a symphony orchestra with its strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion sections, each of these dimensions can be orchestrated to construct a fuller, more enriching experience. While there are times when one dimension may be featured, the goal is to seek balance, harmony, and vibrancy among the four dimensions.

Being Personally Inviting with Oneself

If an inviting approach is supposed to be good enough to do with others, it should be good enough to

do with oneself. Constantly sacrificing oneself to meet the needs of others causes resentment. To be a long-term, beneficial presence in the lives of others, it is vital that educators care for themselves. This means that they also view themselves as able, valuable, responsible, and growing in their experiences. Educators who adopt the inviting approach seek to understand that, while they are not all they could be, they are more than they were; and they like the direction in which they are heading.

Being personally inviting with oneself is limited only by a lack of imagination. In practical terms, it can include renewing oneself by keeping in good shape, enjoying a lovely vista, doing a personal first, trying something new on the computer, playing a musical instrument, taking a dog for a walk, developing relaxation techniques, enjoying a good restaurant, or getting a good night's sleep. Possibilities are limitless.

In terms of personal mental health, being personally inviting means paying attention to one's self-talk, what one says to oneself about oneself. When we speak to ourselves about ourselves, we are both sender and receiver of messages. Educators attending to the quality and subtlety of their personal self-talk can develop a deeper appreciation of the inner world of others.

Being Personally Inviting with Others

Inviting educators must develop cooperative relationships with others. Being inviting means caring about others. It is important to have a support group where one can share feelings, commiserate, and have a good laugh.

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On a practical level, this means promoting civility, letting people know you care, and keeping informed about people's lives. It also means being aware of the negative effects of sarcasm and misplaced humor. In schools, social committees serve a vital function in developing a network of caring individuals. Some social committees have developed a school newsletter to keep people in touch with each other. Others use online chat groups to keep up with events. In the long run, it is easier to stand up for important educational purposes when there is a support network.

Being Professionally Inviting with Oneself

Educators, as intellectual workers, have a special responsibility to study the ideas they teach. In a postmodern, pluralistic, democratic culture, this means attending to the knowledge and experiences that students and colleagues are bringing to the education setting. In addition, educators have a special obligation to gain skill in and be aware of the possibilities and limitations of new electronic sources of information. The knowledge revolution needs the skill and wisdom of an informed education profession.

In practical terms, inviting oneself professionally involves joining professional groups, trying new teaching or counseling methods, participating in an online discussion group, doing action research, making professional presentations, and spending time reading. Inviting oneself professionally means being an active member of a professional learning community (DuFour and Eaker 1998).

Being Professionally Inviting with Others

Invitational education is about cordially and creatively summoning human potential. In inviting others professionally, educators use their knowledge and experience so that students will learn to appreciate, comprehend, and enrich more of their experiences. Educators can build on a commitment to lifelong education by showing students that the most important thing they can learn in school is to enjoy learning. An emphasis on "self-concept-as-learner" (Harper and Purkey 1993) points to ways to develop important education strategies.

Students who have a good self-concept-as-learner are able to successfully *relate*, *assert*, *invest*, and *cope* with circumstances.

Relating deals with the level of trust and appreciation that the student shows to others. This is enhanced by giving students a variety of ways with which to interact in the classroom and by making sure that students are not ignored.

Asserting describes a student's sense of control over what happens in the classroom. Classroom activities that encourage democratic decision making, cultural appreciation, and peace making promote positive assertive development.

Investing encompasses a student's willingness to inquire and to try new things. Giving students a chance to speculate, answer open-ended questions, and identify with their assignments helps investing behaviors grow.

Coping refers to developing a sense of competence in being able to meet school expectations. This is encouraged by having students achieve meaningful success. Being able to do something well means students must first be willing to do something poorly. A fear of criticism prevents many students from even trying. Where there is an overemphasis on evaluation, invitational educators need to emphasize that their job is not to continually weigh the baby, but to feed it. To do this, educators need to develop the skills of inviting.

Developing Beyond the Basic Skills of Inviting

There are 10 strategies educators can use to make invitational education a consistent part of their lives. These strategies take practitioners from preparation to interaction to follow-up.

1. *Preparing the environment.* In getting ready to work with others in an inviting way, educators need to create a clean, comfortable, and safe setting where people can feel included and at ease. This means making sure that rooms are adequately heated, lighted, and ventilated. Living plants and colorful artwork can make a room particularly inviting. Also, inviting educators should consider the use of good smells. One teacher brings in microwaved cinnamon apples to create a homelike smell in her classroom.

Any environment can be made better. This does not have to be done alone. Involving others in the process of bettering the environment helps create a cooperative spirit and a sense of ownership. If there is a shortage of ideas, look at what kindergarten teachers do with their classrooms.

31

An easy place to begin to improve any school's environment is with the posted signs. Quite simply, all signs in an education institution should use positive statements and should provide a brief rationale. For example, the sign, "Keep off the grass," can be changed to "Please walk on the sidewalk so our plants can grow." Inviting signs send messages even when no educator is present.

2. *Getting oneself ready.* Developing the craft of inviting is a professional and personal affair. One way to prepare psychologically is to revisit situations in which one was professionally invited or disinvited and to recognize the feelings, thoughts, and actions that followed. This helps move invitational thinking from remote, abstract theorizing to close personal reflection.

Educators also need to prepare themselves for the diversity they will encounter. This means assessing one's stereotypes and biases and developing strategies to counteract them. Reading, attending workshops, taking part in ethnic festivals, and helping develop new curricula are ways to expand one's horizons and develop sensitivity to diversity.

Another useful strategy is to have a colleague provide caring and honest feedback so that one can examine one's own verbal comments and personal behaviors. This can be a useful method for eliminating unintentionally disinviting behaviors.

3. *Developing trust.* Being intentionally inviting is a cooperative process dependent on goodwill. However, goodwill is not something that can be legislated; it re-

quires being trustworthy over time. Trustworthiness can be developed by demonstrating interest in others and helping them achieve meaningful goals.

Trust is often fragile, at least in its early stages, and can be negated by being judgmental, not respecting confidentiality, and not following through on agreements. Nonverbal behaviors also play an important part in developing trust. Discrepancies between what is said and how it is said send up red flags to others.

Appropriate self-disclosure can be an important part of a trusting relationship. This does not mean an unbridled divulgence of all of one's feelings, but a befitting acknowledgment of perceptions related to the situation and deeper goals being pursued. Trust is vital to inviting relationships and has to be approached with integrity and care.

4. *Reaching each person*. Educators have to ensure that their invitations are distributed fairly and sensitively. Perceived favoritism and exclusion can be seen as disinviting.

Good organization in sending invitations involves having a plan for reaching those who might be excluded. For teachers, this can be done by having a card for each student in class and rotating the cards to ensure that each and every student is given personal attention sometime during the week. For administrators, this can mean making sure that different people can share their perceptions of what is happening in the school or in their life.

Though written communication is greatly facilitated by the use of the Internet, taking the time to send a per-

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sonal note to each colleague demonstrates appreciation. One principal has a personal file card on each employee, noting his or her birthday and personal interests. She sends a personal note to each one on his or her birthday. Whenever she finds an article related to their personal interests, she forwards it to them. She says that this has put her in better contact with more people and that she is more aware of what is happening inside and outside the school.

5. *Reading situations.* Invitational educators pay attention to contexts. That is, they attend to the nature of situations and how messages are being received, interpreted, and acted on. This means attending to what is unique in each situation and how it is related to other situations. It also means being able to see the world from the point of view of others and to view their actions as following logically from their perceptions. This enables educators to go beyond surface impressions to deeper human concerns. For example, sometimes students may say they don't care, when the deeper message is that they don't want to fail. Conversely, sometimes students show agreement or express understanding when they are not comprehending something. Reading situations means probing messages for their invitational possibilities.

6. *Making invitations attractive.* Invitational educators aim to call forth and sustain imaginative acts of hope. People are attracted to invitations if they perceive energy, care, and competence in the sender and good possibilities if they say yes to the invitations. This requires that those transmitting hopeful possibilities should do

so in ways that embody enriching prospects. This involves sensitivity to human wants and paying attention to the likely responses to requests.

At the very least, making invitations attractive means avoiding mechanical, vague, or uninformed invitations, which people usually tune out. For example, nonspecific praise tends to be ignored. On the more positive side, attractive invitations involve a flair and uniqueness that calls forth even the most recalcitrant resisters. Being able to point out specific positive details that are meaningful to a person indicates that time was taken for care to be there.

Educators must be careful that their invitations are not too restrictive. Sometimes invitations can be overly demanding of time and energy or educators may use "limited time" invitations. An instance of this is an administrator saying to a teacher, "We just have a few minutes between classes, let's have a quick cup of tea."

7. *Ensuring delivery.* Delivery is an essential part of invitational education because invitations are more than good intentions. They are concrete actions. To have a chance to get the job done, they need to be sent, received, and acknowledged. Many intended invitations are lost in the sender's mind and never sent. Others lack clarity and directness so that the recipient is unclear about what has been accepted. To counter this, it is important to be specific about invitations and to check their receipt. For example, the invitation, "Let's do lunch sometime," is much less specific than "Let's have lunch at the cafeteria tomorrow." The latter invitation can be confirmed by stating, "See you tomorrow at noon, okay?" In seeking

confirmation of an invitation, the sender can find out if the message was received and what the receiver intends to do. The invitation may be declined, but the sender has a better understanding of what may be the difficulty.

8. *Negotiating alternatives*. The inviting transaction is a dialogue because both the sender and the receiver are meaningful participants. The sender determines the rules for extending the invitation. The receiver determines the rules for acceptance. Often this process is straightforward, and invitations are accepted and meaningfully acted on. However, when an invitation is declined, it may have to be amended and resubmitted. In the cooperative, democratic nature of the inviting process, this can be done by negotiating alternatives. If a person has found that several invitations have been declined, the sender may simply say, "If you will not accept this invitation, let me know one you will accept." This gets the cards on the table, and there is a better chance of getting to an agreement. This message may have to be used with some students who are not used to being invited and may decline an invitation when it is first offered because they wish to see if the teacher really means it.

9. *Handling rejection*. Because the inviting process is a dialogue, the recipient can accept, reject, negotiate, or hold in abeyance the invitation. There are no guarantees that every invitation will be accepted. In fact, it is fair to assume that many invitations will not be accepted. Although the possibility of rejection comes with the territory, it still can hurt.

First, however, it is important for an educator to decide if the invitation was truly rejected. Not accepting is different than rejecting. The recipient may be holding an invitation in abeyance and be thinking about how and when it will be acted on.

Nevertheless, there are obvious times when an invitation is clearly rejected. It is important to separate the rejection of the invitation from the rejection of one's person. People may have a variety of reasons for rejecting invitations, reasons that have nothing to do with the extender of the message. It might just be that extending this invitation, even if it is rejected, may make it easier for the recipient to accept another one.

The inviting approach takes persistence and resiliency. During these rejecting moments, it may be important to take comfort in inviting oneself personally and to find support by accepting others' invitations.

10. *Following through.* The inviting process ends with the initiator of the message following through on accepted invitations, examining and negotiating unaccepted ones, and constructing new ones. The follow-through process on accepted invitations involves making sure that what was offered is made available. To get someone to accept an invitation and then not follow through can be doubly disinviting and exponentially damaging. If an invitation has been accepted and acted on successfully, an educator should savor that moment and perhaps recall it later when other invitations are not being accepted. People can invite only as long as their heart can endure. Hearty inviters have a reservoir of memorable experiences from which to draw.

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The idea of inviting is simple, but not easy. Developing beyond the basic skills of inviting involves commitment, the ability to use many dimensions of one's personality, and the courage to face rejection. These skills are extended as educators try inviting ways to manage conflict.

Managing Conflict

Conflict is a part of life. Even invitational educators cannot escape it. The test for invitational educators is to deal with conflict in an effective and inviting manner. With this in mind, the "Rule of the Six C's" was developed. This is a procedure to deal with conflict at the lowest possible emotional level, with the least expense of time and energy, and in a caring, respectful, appropriate, and potentially growth-producing way. This approach to managing conflict will not work in every situation. However, it does give educators a humane starting point and can be a means for throwing water, rather than gasoline, on potentially explosive situations. The six C's are *concern, confer, consult, confront, combat,* and *conciliate.*

The rule is to start with the lowest possible C and move toward higher C's only as necessary.

1. *Concern.* The first C deals with whether action is really necessary in a potential conflict situation. What may be at issue is really a preference, rather than a concern. An educator may prefer that students wear less jewelry to class, but this may not really be a matter of concern.

Use of the following questions can enable an educator to decide if intervention is required:

- Am I concerned because of my own prejudices or biases? Is this just one of the inevitable tensions and opportunities that occurs in a pluralistic democracy?
- Are there sufficient resources to address this concern?
- Does the concern involve a matter of legality, ethics, or safety?
- Will it resolve itself without intervention?

Many concerns can be resolved at this level. Some may be more significant and require movement to the next C.

2. *Confer*. In managing conflict, professional educators hold to higher standards than the average layperson. Educators should aim to invite voluntary compliance with reasonable rules. This is done first by demonstrating self-control. Next, the educator should initiate, in private, a conversation about what the concern is, why it is a concern, and what is proposed to resolve it and then obtain voluntary verbal compliance. Getting agreement to comply will be important if a move to a higher level becomes necessary. Here is an example of using this method: "Michael, your arriving late to class disrupts the lesson. Will you please arrive on time? Will you do this for me?" The latter question shows that it is the teacher's concern that is being addressed and that the student has agreed to help.

Some questions to consider at this level are:

- After expressing concern, has the educator listened carefully to encourage honest communication?
- Is there a clear understanding by both parties regarding the nature of the concern?
- Is there room for new information or a reconceptualization of the situation? (Perhaps the student's previous class runs late?) Has the educator asked for and received voluntary compliance?

In many instances, this respectful dialogue will adequately handle the situation. In cases where it is not sufficient, it is time to move to consultation.

3. *Consult*. The move to consultation is a move to a more formal stage of clear and direct talk. The educator reminds the student of what was agreed and assists the student in coming up with an acceptable way to meet the agreement. For example, "Michael, you said you would be on time for class. How may I assist you in living up to your word?"

Questions that may be helpful at this level:

- Is it still clear what is expected?
- Has any new information changed the situation?
- Are there ways the educator can assist the other person to abide by the agreement?
- Is the concern important enough to move to confrontation?

If clear and direct communication, along with assistance to help, have not changed the situation, then it is time to move to the next level.

4. *Confront*. Confrontation is an attempt to resolve the concern at a no-nonsense level. While respectful, an educator will point out that this situation has been addressed previously and repeatedly, that the person gave his or her word that it would be resolved, and that the problem still continues. It is here that logical consequences will be mentioned. For example, "Michael, you said you would be on time for class. Should you be late again, I will put you on report."

The following questions should be asked to attempt again to resolve the problem at the lowest possible level:

- Has there been an earnest effort to manage the conflict at a lower level?
- Is there documented evidence to show that earlier efforts have been made, without success, to resolve the conflict at lower levels?
- Is there sufficient authority, power, and will to go through with the stated consequences?

If the previous levels have been applied and the stated consequences are fair and respectful, yet the issue continues, then it is time to move to the next level.

5. *Combat*. Combat, as used here, is a verb meaning to reduce or eliminate the situation, not the person. Because the conflict has not been resolved at each of the lower levels, it is now time to follow through on consequences with direct, immediate, and firm action. At this level, stakes are high and there can be winners and losers. Results are unpredictable. Moreover, having to combat a situation takes time and energy, so this level should be entered into carefully.

Here are some questions to ask in preparing to combat situations:

- Is there clear documentation that other avenues were tried?
- Is there room for any other solution?
- Has the educator sought help from fellow professionals and legal experts before reaching this high level?

Even in dealing at the combat level, the invitational educator acts in light of the principle that people are valuable, able, and responsible and should be treated accordingly. This spirit is carried over into the final C, conciliate.

6. *Conciliate.* Following the combating of a conflict, it is vital to restore a noncombative quality to the education environment. Former combatants and noncombatants need to find ways to carry on and possibly grow from what has taken place. Three principles are used at this conciliating stage. First, do no harm. This means avoid fanning the flames of tension. Second, allow some distance. This is not the time for "in your face" interactions. Third, stick with the principles of invitational education.

Some questions to consider at the conciliation level:

- Do I show respect by not rubbing it in?
- Do the parties involved have some time and space to get back to normal interactions?
- Can helpful intermediaries be used?
- Do I return to the first C when a new conflict occurs?

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The "Rule of the Six C's" may sound simple; but it takes much reflection, self-control, and practice to use it on a regular basis. That being said, it should be noted that students at Cameron Park Elementary School in Hillsborough, North Carolina, use the approach to handle conflicts in the school. They have the six C's listed on yellow plastic cards that they use when a conflict occurs. Everyone receives training, but a smaller group receives more intensive work and serves as managers. School counselor Tom Carr believes the approach enables students to better handle anger and to get along with others.

The best way to learn a new approach to conflict management may be to teach it to students and to use it throughout the school. When others are involved, it is easier to move beyond basic skills.

Strategies for Inviting Change

A general principle of invitational education is that if good things are happening, celebrate them and work to make them better. If not-so-good things are happening, work to make them better. Building on the good to make things better is fundamental to invitational change.

The inviting family model points to a positive direction for change. The invitational helix provides a systematic way to proceed.

The Inviting Family Model

Invitational education has been applied from the preschool to postsecondary levels in diverse settings throughout the world. In spite of their diversity, these education institutions share a commitment to proactive, cooperative relationships and the attempt to make their school more like an inviting family than an efficient factory.

An efficient factory emphasizes mass production, uniform product, cost effectiveness, technology, centralized control, and workers as functionaries. When

applied to education, this translates into large, impersonal schools with uniform outcome indicators, no-frill curricula, an overemphasis on high-tech equipment, hierarchical institutional structures, and interchangeable employees. What is emphasized is efficiency and production above all else.

Basing schools on the metaphor of an inviting family emphasizes connectedness to others and individual fulfillment. What follows are six characteristics of an inviting family school, along with some questions for discussion and planning for any group that wishes to make its institution more like an inviting family.

An inviting family school has the following six characteristics:

1. *Respect for individual uniqueness.* Each member of the school is seen as a unique person who has something to offer.

- What is positive and unique about this school?
- How is individual uniqueness celebrated?
- How do evaluations honor individual uniqueness?
- How are students and others offered assistance if they are having difficulty?

2. *Cooperative spirit.* Members of the school work together for the good of each other and seek to help others in need.

- Is mutual support stressed over competition?
- Do a variety of people work on committees?
- Is input sought from parents, staff, and students?
- Is peer teaching and networking encouraged?

3. *Sense of belonging*. Members of the school community think in terms of *our* school, *our* students, and *our* projects.

- Is the school perceived as a caring place?
- Are there supportive networks available for everyone in the school?
- How are people treated during and after absences?
- What shared social events are there within the school?

4. *Pleasing habitat*. The landscape, upkeep, and general appearance are given careful attention.

- Does the school appear cared for?
- Is everyone involved in caring for the school?
- Are there green plants throughout the school?
- Does the school have the feeling of a pleasing habitat?

5. *Positive expectations*. School members look forward to the development of the unique talents of everyone in the school.

- Do administrators and teachers say good things about each other?
- Do teachers and students say good things about each other?
- How are diverse student successes encouraged and showcased?
- How are some imaginative acts of hope demonstrated in the school?

6. *Vital connections to society*. School members have wide and varied connections to the outside world and discuss current events within the school.

- How active is the school in the outside community?
- How visible is the outside community in the school?
- How visible are volunteers in the school?
- How are global issues discussed in the school?

Discussing these questions is a good way to develop interest in creating an inviting education institution. When this discussion is followed by a more systematic analysis and a cumulative set of prescriptions, good things have a better chance of happening. The invitational helix was developed with this in mind.

The Invitational Helix

Creating an inviting education institution requires artfully applying theory to a real context through the commitment of a diverse group of people. The invitational helix (Purkey and Novak 1993) was developed to facilitate this process.

The helix is rooted in the idea that a commitment to invitational education moves from being aware of it, to understanding it, to applying it, to adopting it. In addition, commitments may vary in intensity, with some institutions merely seeking to introduce some inviting practices, others wishing to apply it systematically, while still others wanting to use it as a pervasive philosophy.

Using these four stages (awareness, understanding, application, and adoption) and three phases of interest (occasional, systematic, and pervasive), the helix provides a 12-step guide (three phases with four stages

each) that helps locate where an institution is currently and where it needs to go next. Education change is certainly more complex than this, but this process provides a structured way to begin. Change, like the helix, can move from the simple to the more complex.

Occasional Interest (Phase I)

A key point of invitational education is to build on the good things that already are being done in the school. During this first phase, a variety of good practices are highlighted and new ones offered. Enthusiasm, renewal, and nonthreatening suggestions are stressed.

Step 1: Initial Exposure. Beginning awareness can happen by reading some introductory materials, hearing a speaker, watching a videotape, or attending a conference. This often is an enjoyable experience that reminds educators about what really should matter in education.

Step 2: Structured Dialogue. This step involves organized discussion following a program, speech, or a team or job meeting. Emphasis is on recognizing and appreciating inviting practices that already are taking place and then explaining why they are inviting.

Step 3: General Agreement to Try. The purpose here is to try out a variety of new ideas and to see what works and might be continued. This step involves small alterations, such as changing the signs in a school, adding additional lighting in the parking lot, or starting a new extracurricular club.

Step 4: Uncoordinated Use and Sharing. During this step, individuals and groups report on what works and

what needs more work. Many of the new initiatives are adopted and become publicly recognized. Highlighting successful new practices sets the stage to move to deeper levels of practice.

Systematic Application (Phase II)

After a period of initial success, groups can work to introduce integrative change within the institution. Integrative change means that people are willing to work together and look beyond their classroom, their offices, and their students to find good ways to make the whole school a shared concern.

Step 5: Intensive Study. An awareness of invitational education as a systemic approach is introduced here. The invitational model, with its foundations, stance, levels, and areas of application, is usually explained by an experienced and knowledgeable person who has a solid background in invitational theory.

Step 6: Applied Comprehension. Understanding in this phase means that those involved in making invitational education an integrated plan of action in their school take the time to discuss their comprehension of its key ideas. It is here that what currently is happening in the school is examined in terms of inviting criteria.

Step 7: Strand Organization. Using the "5 P's" of invitational education, teams are organized into people, places, policies, programs, and processes strands. Using a rotating procedure, each strand shares its goals, ways of proceeding, obstacles envisioned, ways of overcoming obstacles, and methods of evaluation. A coordina-

tor is chosen for each strand, and goals are established by consensus.

Step 8: Systematic Incorporation. It is now time for strands to establish their own names and logos and to meet regularly. In addition, strand coordinators also meet, and information is given to all members of the school community. During this step, networks may be formed with other schools.

Pervasive Adoption (Phase III)

In this highest phase, the inviting perspective permeates the institution and becomes the way things are done. The institution moves outside itself and provides leadership to other schools and systems. In doing so, it strengthens its own bonds.

Step 9: Leadership Development. An awareness of the complexity of invitational education develops as emerging leaders formally explore the relationship between invitational education and other school goals. Informally, members of inviting strands discuss ways to explore new approaches to teaching and learning.

Step 10: In-Depth Analysis and Extension. A deeper understanding of invitational education means that invitational leaders can critically analyze it and compare and contrast it with other approaches to education. New program initiatives are examined and modified using inviting criteria.

Step 11: Confrontation of Major Challenges. In applying invitational education at its deepest levels, members of the school community take a proactive stance and

address key issues that affect the school and the community. Insights and participation from students, parents, and those outside the school are used to develop a deeper sense of purpose.

Step 12: Transformation. At this step, invitational theory is ubiquitous and permeates the whole school. The school operates as an inviting family and serves as a model for what schools can become. Members of the school make presentations at other schools and conferences. Celebrations of success are everywhere. If educators wish to see examples of this ideal, they should visit Calcium Primary School in New York and Grand Island High School in Nebraska.

Conclusion

We are in the midst of a powerful movement in education based on the simple, ethical idea that everyone matters and every way we do things matters. Everyone matters, so the way we talk to ourselves matters. How we interact with each other matters. What we teach and learn matters. How we work together matters. The type of society we are creating matters. The type of world we are leaving for future generations matters. With inspiration and articulation from academic, religious, political, and education leaders, and through the struggles of determined people throughout the world, this idea has taken root.

Discussions about the meaning of "Everyone Matters" and the "Three R's of Implementation" — Rights, Responsibilities, and Resources — are occurring throughout the globe. Invitational education is one voice in this movement, which hopes to meet human potential through sustained, imaginative acts of hope.

This fastback has provided the basic principles, concepts, and practices of invitational education so that its voice can be better articulated and this larger global education movement can gain strength. Anyone wish-

ing more information about invitational education can contact the International Alliance for Invitational Education, c/o School of Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, P.O. Box 26171, Greensboro, NC 27402-6171, or visit the website at www.InvitationalEducation.net.

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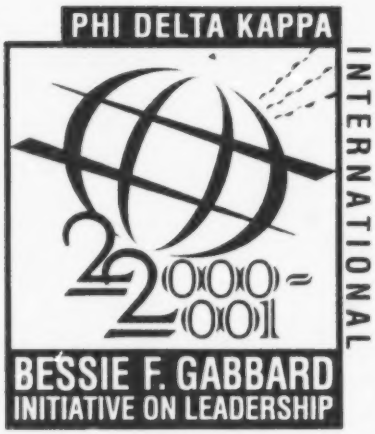

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The girls' basketball team at Sacred Heart Academy in Cleveland, Ohio, strikes a pose in this early photograph, circa 1930.

Courtesy of the Cleveland Public Library Photograph Collection.